



UNIVERSITY OF  
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# IFAS EXTENSION

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

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## **Deciduous magnolias offer winter beauty**

Have you noticed the magnolias blooming in recent weeks? You may not have recognized these plants as magnolias but if you see one in bloom, you can't help but notice it.

Some people think of the southern magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*, when they think of magnolias. But there are a large number of different species to consider for use in our North Florida landscapes. In addition to the evergreen types, there are deciduous types as well.

A number of the deciduous magnolias make outstanding additions to our landscapes along the Gulf Coast. Being deciduous, they lose their leaves during winter. And before the leaves emerge in spring, the plant puts on a beautiful floral display. These are among the first of the landscape shrubs to flower in our area.

Deciduous flowering magnolias generally are considered small trees with slow to moderate growth rates. Smaller cultivars may be grown as large shrubs and some larger trees may eventually grow to about thirty feet tall. When young they have a more upright shape but they become rounded or broad-spreading with age.

In Florida, they grow best in full sunlight to partial shade on moist, well drained soils. Acid to neutral soils are preferred but slightly alkaline soils are also suitable for growth. It's best to avoid exposed, windy locations because strong winds can damage their large flowers and the typically brittle branches.

All magnolias are sensitive to excessively deep planting. During installation, make certain that the top of the root ball is slightly higher than the surrounding soil surface.

The star magnolia, *Magnolia stellata*, has become the best known species because it is widely adaptable and blooms when very small. Its flowers are three to five inches in diameter and are white, although a few cultivars have pinkish flowers. The star magnolia is valued for its cold hardiness.

One of the first magnolias to bloom in our area is the saucer magnolia, botanically known as *Magnolia x soulangiana*. In February, these plants will be covered with rose pink flowers. If you look closely at the flowers, you'll note the outside of each tepal, or petal-like flower part, is rosy-purple while the inside is white, giving the overall effect of a rose pink flower color. Saucer magnolias are renowned for their heavy flowering, but they are also infamous for flowering so early in the year that frosts often damage the flowers, turning them into brown mush.

Their flowers border on the spectacular with color, shape, size and fragrance. Even if the blossoms get killed by freezes every other year, those years in bloom are worth it. The large, fuzzy buds are also unique in the winter garden and this plant does well when used as an accent or specimen plant.

But to avoid the problem of frost damage to flowers, you may want to try one of the later blooming magnolias. The Gresham hybrid magnolias were developed by the late D. Todd Gresham who combined the beautiful flower character, color and size of *Magnolia campbellii*, a beautiful Asian magnolia, with the hardiness and young flowering age of saucer magnolia. These remarkable hybrid magnolias are noted for producing large numbers of flowers up to twelve inches in diameter on vigorous, small to medium trees. Flowers range in color from deep purple-red to alabaster white and typically occur somewhat later than those of saucer magnolia. Some of the best cultivars include Dark Shadow, Darrell Dean, Full Eclipse and Pink Goblet.

The hottest trend in magnolias today is yellow flowering magnolias. Since there are very few yellow flowering trees and shrubs that flower in the spring, yellow flowering magnolias add a whole new color to the spring palate.

If you are interested in learning more about deciduous magnolias, then you may want to consider attending the UF/IFAS Magnolia Field Day on Thursday, March 23, 2006 at the North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC) in Quincy, Florida--just west of Tallahassee.

This year Dr. Gary Knox is going to highlight the yellow flowered magnolias. Yellow flowering magnolias are relatively new, and almost thirty types are planted side-by-side at the UF/IFAS research center to find the best and brightest. During the field day you will also have the opportunity to look at some of the other deciduous magnolias that might be in bloom, as well as some of the evergreen magnolias. To register, or for more information, visit <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/magnolia.htm> or call (850) 875-7100, extension 0.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>